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RICH AUSTIN OF ILWU LOCAL 10 & 32, PCPA

INTERVIEWEE: RICH AUSTIN

INTERVIEWER: HARVEY SCHWARTZ

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[00:00:00] **HARVEY SCHWARTZ:** This is at the Pacific Coast Pensioners Association Convention [in Tacoma, Washington] in September 2016. Today is [September] 12. We're with Rich Austin. Rich, can you tell me when you were born and where your were born?

[00:00:27] **RICH AUSTIN:** Sure. I was born in 1941 in Berkeley, California. My father was a longshoreman and my mother worked at home as a homemaker. Both my parents were activists, real progressive.

[00:00:46] **HARVEY:** What country did they come from originally?

[00:00:50] **RICH:** They both were born in the United States, my mother in Minnesota and my father right here in Washington of parents who were immigrants. My mother's side was from Ireland and my father's side was from somewhere in that area also, it's not clear.

[00:01:11] **HARVEY:** You say your dad was a longshoreman?

[00:01:14] **RICH:** Yeah.

[00:01:17] **HARVEY:** When did he get in the union, do you know?

[00:01:18] **RICH:** Well, yeah. He started out working in the woods up in the Aberdeen, Washington area. Then went to sea and worked in the black gang. Then got off in San Francisco, and sometime during the 34 strike, he became involved with the ILWU. So, he's been in the union for a long time, and then he transferred to the Clerks at some point way, way back, to Local 34 in San Francisco, and then from there to Local 63 in Wilmington, California.

[00:02:00] **HARVEY:** Right. You mentioned that he gets involved around the 34 strike. Was he a "34 man," as they were called, guys who were involved in that strike?

[00:02:12] **RICH:** Yeah, he was involved in the strike.

[00:02:17] **HARVEY:** What was his name by the way?

[00:02:19] **RICH:** His name was Parmelee Leonard Austin.

[00:02:19] **HARVEY:** How do you spell Parmelee?

[00:02:25] **RICH:** P-A-R-M-E-L-E-E.

[00:02:28] **HARVEY:** Do you know what he did during the big strike?

[00:02:35] **RICH:** No. And, you know, it's a very interesting thing, but my dad and his uncles were somewhat close of lip. They didn't reveal too much about anything, even their family life and so on. And I think it was a preconditioning, because they had gone through those times when there were a lot of stool pigeons [police informants]. I can recall one time hearing my mother say that he had been arrested for criminal syndicalism. I didn't understand what that meant, but that evidently he was on a Federal bail that some people in the party raised to get him out. And I didn't understand that either at that time. I later came to understand that.

I was raised in a household—I have two sisters and a brother, my older sister is deceased now—where we never heard racial epithets, so I was lucky in that regard. We had people of all races and nationalities visit us at our house. I recall, as an example, one Labor Day—I believe it was in 1948—the people are marching down Market Street, all the workers, and all of a sudden, the ILWU contingent comes along. They're walking eight abreast, and they're walking smartly, and the men are dressed in hickory shirts and white longshore hats and the Frisco jeans, and the women in white blouses and black skirts. And all of a sudden, my dad waved to me [to] come out and join. We marched from there up to City Hall. We heard speeches there, and from there we went to our house. Some of my dad's chums and their families came over. And, as things were back then, the guys kind of sat around and they talked about different things, the women were talking about their things, and the kids were out in the yard. Well, I didn't go out in the yard. I listened to these old salts, and they used words like comrade and sister and brother. It was just something that captivated me and I had to stay and listen to them.

My dad was also known one time as the “Red Mayor” of El Cerrito. Now, he wasn’t elected to anything, but back in the old days there, if they didn’t make a job at the hall, they’d go out and find a picket line someplace and walk with other workers on the picket line, because that was part of the whole worker solidarity. And I’m sure it was also to help spread a certain political ideology about workers helping one another in distress and so on and so forth.

[00:05:35] **HARVEY:** You mentioned El Cerrito. Did you grow up in El Cerrito? You were born in Berkeley you said.

[00:05:39] **RICH:** I was born in Berkeley. One of the areas we lived in was El Cerrito. We also lived in San Francisco, Fairfax. Jumped around.

[00:05:50] **HARVEY:** Was your dad politically active?

[00:05:52] **RICH:** He was politically active, very much so, until sometime in the 50s when a disillusionment entered the minds of many people who had looked upon the Bolshevik uprising, as an example, as an inspiration. But then when the excesses in the Soviet Union took place, they couldn’t excuse that because democrat centralism, to them, meant that the democratic decisions arrived at in a democratic forum would then be centralized, and that would become the workings of the organization.

[00:06:40] **HARVEY:** Was your dad a party member?

[00:06:41] **RICH:** Yeah, he was a party member. But around the mid- 50s, he left the party because it became more doctrinaire, in his estimation, and more top-controlled. It was a great disappointment to him also, because he had invested a lot of time and energy in this vision and dream. It was a very big disappointment to him.

[00:07:08] **HARVEY:** Did he leave in 1956 when the Khrushchev speech was made?

[00:07:12] **RICH:** I don’t know. It was around that time. I also had uncles who were said to be members of the party. So, all of them are said to be member of the party, but they’re all passed on now, so my best guess is they were.

[00:07:33] **HARVEY:** Do you know what union activity your dad was involved in, say, in the 40s and 50s?

[00:07:38] **RICH:** Well, no. I heard a story about him going over to the Fish Reduction Workers Union in Richmond, I believe it was, to talk—excuse me, not the union, the fish reduction workers, they didn’t have a union—to go over and to try to get them to organize, and he got beat up over there by company stooges. Then he went back to the hall and they loaded up a few carloads of longshoremen, and he went back over there and he made his speech unmolested after that. [chuckles] He was politically active, but he wasn’t in a leadership position, but he was certainly a person that would give his opinion on anything of importance.

[00:08:35] **HARVEY:** Can you tell us a little bit about your youth and schooling, early jobs, any military experience, that kind of thing?

[00:08:41] **RICH:** I went to school. I started in, I think, El Cerrito, and then from there to Fairfax, and then from there to Wilmington, California because my dad transferred down to southern California. I went to part of grammar school in Wilmington and junior high school, and then I attended Banning High School. I left there before I got credentialed [laughing] and went off on my own. Did a number of jobs. At some point I went back to classes and got a GED. Then I did a little junior college, but I wasn’t invested in anything. I didn’t have a vision of what I wanted to be.

Actually, what I wanted to be was a longshoreman, because as a kid in Wilmington, you would go down on the docks and you could actually walk on the vessels. I'd go on the vessels and I'd go down to the engine room, and I would smell the gas, whatever they used down there in the engine room—diesel—and it was alluring to me. There was just a certain smell of an old vessel, and it was romantic, and that just stayed with me. Of course, I heard stories my dad told about the waterfront. He was a great admirer of Harry Bridges. Harry is what they used to call him in my house. I heard a lot of stories, and so that stayed with me.

Sometime before I was old enough to legally do so, I began working as a casual in Wilmington—actually at age 15. I worked down there, and it was a different world in those days. People didn't care—now, they didn't know I was 15, and I didn't tell them I was 15, but as long as I was able to do the work, that was okay. But I wasn't mistreated or anything like that. It was just I was down there before you were legally old enough, I guess, back then, so I guess my first time on the waterfront in Wilmington was 1956, which was an interesting time. I worked bananas and I worked other things down there.

[00:11:20] **HARVEY:** You say you went down there and you learned to work. How did you learn?

[00:11:29] **RICH:** I had inklings of this, and my dad knew I was going to go down there, so all he said is, "Do what you're told to do." He didn't want me to be an upstart or something. "Do what you're told to do." I can remember being down in the hold of this vessel and we were working bananas, and this old-timer came up to me, an old A man. He says, "I've got a tip for you, kid. Don't pick up your second stock until everybody picks up their first. We go in rotation." That was a lesson and a message: Don't miss your turn in the rotation, but don't carry anybody else. That was a good lesson.

But in the old days, to the best of my recollection, and even later when I got registered, if you were willing to do the work, the old-timers were willing to show you how. I learned a lot of knots from my dad, tying knots. I also learned them on the job, specific things to the job. As long as you were willing to do the work and willing to learn, they were willing to teach. So I had a great experience with the old-times on the waterfront.

[00:12:43] **HARVEY:** What else do you remember from that first day on the job?

[00:12:48] **RICH:** I remember that I was frightened to go down there at first—frightened of a brand-new thing, okay? I wanted to do the job well, and I wanted to make sure I didn't break any rules inadvertently. But I was guided, not because I was anybody special, because my dad wasn't an official or anything so they didn't treat me special. They just treated people who were willing to do the work well.

[00:13:18] **HARVEY:** You said you did work as a casual when you were 15 years old. Then you said you went off on your own and did other jobs? What were those other jobs?

[00:13:27] **RICH:** I became a salesman for a while. I went to junior college, like I said, for a little bit, and when I left junior college I got a job with a stationery store in Santa Rosa, California. I was selling stationery in a stationery store and I got training there—they made me an outside salesman—so I used to sell office supplies. Then I went from there to Schwabacher-Frey in San Francisco and had an outside territory. This was nice. They treated me good, I made decent money and it was a good outfit. The warehouse was union. [chuckles] But I always missed the waterfront.

I saw an application in the newspaper that they were taking applications for B registration, so I put it in. I remember, I came home about two weeks later and there was a card that my wife had put on the mantle. The card says, "You have been accepted for class B registration." Then I had to do a couple things—get a physical

and so on. May 15, 1967 was my first day as a registered B longshoreman. Great teachers there, too. Some of the old-timers were great, wonderful people, and that was in Local 10.

[00:14:59] **HARVEY:** Who were those guys? Do you remember their names?

[00:15:01] **RICH:** I remember a lot of guys. We talk about Cleophas [Williams] . Cleophas was a great political mentor for me. Archie Brown, George Kaye, Frank Stout. Bill Bailey was a dear friend of my uncle. As a matter of fact, my uncle Ken is mentioned in Bill Bailey's book. Bill Bailey got hauled before HUAC [House Un-American Activities Committee] . They were going to try to find out some stuff about Bill, so they called some witnesses. One of them was my uncle. They asked him some questions. "Mr. Austin, what do you do here?" "I refuse to answer on the grounds it may tend to incriminate me." "What about this?" Same answer. Same answer. Same answer. Finally they found out they weren't going to get any information out of Ken Austin, so they excused him, and on the way out they said, "Do you have any questions of us?" And he said, "Yeah, who's going to pay me for today's [time] ?" [laughing] Well, if you knew Ken, that was typical of him.

He was also a mariner before he became a longshoreman, and they told stories about how, in the old days, when they were organizing, they'd identify stool pigeons on the vessel. And in a man overboard drill, sometimes people got lost overboard. Now, those were hard times, but, you know, their lives were at stake, too. A stool pigeon would put their lives at stake and their livelihoods and so on, so those were rough times back then trying to crawl their way out of this abyss that capitalism had put them in.

[00:16:49] **HARVEY:** How would they identify a stool pigeon?

[00:16:51] **RICH:** I don't know the answer to that question.

[00:16:58] **HARVEY:** That's okay. Can you tell me what period of time, for the next several years after 67 that you worked on the waterfront as a longshoreman, and what products you worked, and what products you liked and what products you disliked?

[00:17:13] **RICH:** When I was in San Francisco, I was known as a good worker, and so I learned how to rig all the gears—gun tackle gears, the frisco [transcriber did not capitalize frisco here because it sounds like a type of gear, or to frisco a gear] gear. Learned how to rig [?ray tents?] . Swinging boom. I did all those things because it was part of my job. I look at the contract—and I even believe this today—the contract asks four things of us—that's to show up in numbers, agree to numbers, with people who can do the work, and then do the work. So, show up in time with people who can do the work, do the work. What's the other thing? That's it. The employer has to provide the tools, they have to provide the wages. So, I was hired to move cargo.

Sometimes I moved cargo that was very easy, and sometimes I moved cargo like fishmeal that was stinky and rotten. Or copra, or gilsonite, or hides, or drums that were not too—but it was all part of my job, and it all evens out. You get the easier work, you get the hard work. But the point is is that—and I even think this carries on later in life—you can go to the job and you can let the job beat you, or you can say, "I'm here until the end of the shift, and I'm going to do a good job until the end of the shift. And at the end of the shift, I don't have to work anymore." That's how it is, so you don't let the in-between time bother you.

I did a good job not because I believed in a good day's work for a good day's pay. I did a good job because I wanted to make the union look good. The union labor is the one that does the good job for you. Perhaps back in the back of my mind, I also believed that I had an obligation to work good, and I think that comes maybe from a work ethic I got as a kid. My dad was one that I'd say, "Hey, Dad, can I have a buck to go to the show?" A buck! Can you imagine that? [laughing] He says, "Yeah, wash the car." I knew that was coming. "Dad, can I have a buck to go to the show?" "Yeah, go out and clean out the garage." I just knew that was coming, that was

part of the deal, so I had already figured that in. But it was a way of saying money just doesn't fall off a tree, you have to work for it. He wasn't stingy, it was just a lesson, I think, and in a way, I passed that onto my kids, too, that we all had a chores. I was a single parent for a while, so we all had chores to do, my daughter and my son. We all had our chores to do. We all had to live together. And they're just wonderful kids today. A lot of luck on that, I mean, knock on wood, knock on wood. As Jimmy Herman used to say, "As a single parent, I was swimming without water wings." I didn't know what I was doing. I'd never been a single parent before.

[00:20:25] **HARVEY:** Just one thing you mentioned, you knew how to frisco the gear. What does that mean?

[00:20:32] **RICH:** There are two sets of gear at a hatch, the forward end and the after end. Sometimes you have heavy lifts, and so you have to use both sets of gear in order to bring this heavy lift, so you have to use the strength of the four booms. What you would do is you would dead end one end—the running line, the fall—on one set of gear, and that would be turned off. They wouldn't operate. They would operate one end only, but it would double the lifting capacity—not double, but it would greatly increase the lifting capacity, so you could bring in heavy equipment. That means running the falls through frisco blocks and just rigging it the right way so that . . .

[00:21:26] **HARVEY:** So, you're a rigger?

[00:21:27] **RICH:** Well, in the old days, you rigged the gear all the time. In the frisco gear, it's what they used to call midship, that was the offshore guy—midship to midship and yard to yard. That was the inshore guy, the inshore fall, yard to yard, so that's how you would frisco the gear.

[00:21:45] **HARVEY:** When you were doing this, were you a dockman?

[00:21:48] **RICH:** I was right on the deck of the ship. We used to do it on the deck of the ship.

[00:21:52] **HARVEY:** So you're not in the hold when you're doing that?

[00:21:53] **RICH:** No, so they bring all the gears and they set it right here on the deck of the ship, all four falls, and then you take the blacksmith off—that's the old name for a cargo hook—and you put on the frisco blocks, and then you run the falls through the frisco blocks. Then one end would pull up the frisco blocks maybe eight feet from the top of the boom, and then they'd operate the frisco blocks on the other end, the winches on the other end, to take the heavy gear in and out.

[00:22:31] **HARVEY:** Did you ever drive any winches?

[00:22:32] **RICH:** Yeah, sure.

[00:22:36] **HARVEY:** Describe that if you would, too.

[00:22:40] **RICH:** So, we're young and exuberant and we want to learn everything. There was a guy in Local 10 whose name was [?Julius Scarp?] . Julius Scarp looked down in the hold he said, "Youngster!" "Yeah?" "Come on up here." So I went up there and he was teaching me how to drive winches. Okay? We were on the same job for a couple days and he called me up every day. About the third day he called me up— "Youngster, come on up here!" So I went up there, and he went off the vessel to theoretically go to the toilet, only he never came back. [laughing] The guys in the hold—they were short one guy in the hold now—they really didn't care because we all worked together. We were all going to learn how to drive winches and so on and so forth.

The first time I ever drove a Ross carrier , this guy named [?Roy Arreya?] and I went up to the window, and [?Begoni?] , the dispatcher—I can remember this—"Do you how to drive a Ross carrier?" I didn't know the

first thing about it. “Hell, yeah, I know how to drive a Ross carrier!” Because I had seen them be operated before. It couldn’t be that difficult.

So I got out to the dock about 15 minutes early—it was APL at Pier 50—and so went out there, and I jumped on a Ross carrier. They’ve got two shifts—they’ve got forward and reverse and they’ve got high and low. Well, I didn’t know that, so I’m trying to jam this thing and I break off the shifting bar in my hand. And there’s a mechanic looking at me and he sees and I look over at him and he’s going like this. He’s shaking his head! [laughing]

He says, “Get off of it. I’ll get it welded before the shift starts.” So he says, “Lookit. Do you know how these shifts work?” “Well, not really, I guess.” So he says, “This one is forward and reverse, this one is high and low.” After that, I did fine. And then an old-timer says, “Some of these frames on the Ross carriers are sprung, so take a 2 X 4 up there, you reach out and you kind of get there and you pull it over so that you can put the Ross carrier in the proper position before you connect the cargo to it.” So they taught me all kinds of tricks, too.

[00:25:08] **HARVEY:** That’s great. Did you work hides ever?

[00:25:11] **RICH:** Oh, lots of hides.

[00:25:12] **HARVEY:** What’s that like? Is that a lot of fun?

[00:25:14] **RICH:** No, but it was just one of those cargos. I worked hides with maggots on them. I mean, literally. And the juice smelled and all that kind of stuff. There was a trick to hides. First of all, they give you an apron, so you fold the apron in two—I didn’t wear it up here [neck area] because I didn’t carry the hides up here, I carried them down here [waist area] . So, I fold the apron in two. They gave you gloves, but I never wore gloves. BUt the lanolin and the salt in the hides would soften your hands, so it would take the calluses off, it would smooth out your hands after you worked the hides for a few days. So they smelled and so on and so forth, but they didn’t get on your clothes, and so you just had to know how to work the hides and dunnage them off properly. Otherwise, if you went to lunch and you didn’t load them right, by the time you came back they’d all have slopped down.

I took also great pride in being a good longshoreman, knowing how to stow cargo. I belonged to a gang, Gang 206, Pete Acosta’s gang, and we were a pumping gang, and we had a great bunch of workers in it. [?Bobby Elba, Tom Casselli?] . Al Kosloff was a winch driver. [?Pelham?] was one of the dock men.

And we’d all go to lunch as a gang together. We’d have a few pops during lunch. We’d grab our lunch just before we were going to leave. We used pallet boards. The first empty pallet boards that would come in that we’d load, or the first full load that came in, [Al] would have a six-pack on. He says, “For my boys in the hold [?might be saying hole?] . He’d always do that, and that was Al Kosloff. [laughing]

So it was a great gang. We took great pride then in doing the right things so that we had a pride of being Gang 206. We used to get on the vessel, we’d try to rig the gear first. We’d try to be the first gang to uncover, the first gang that put the first load on, the first gang to put the first load out. [laughing] It was just good competition between fellow workers.

[00:27:40] **HARVEY:** I wanted to ask you first, which dock did you work on that had hides typically? Was there one dock that did hides or were there several?

[00:27:47] **RICH:** There were several. I think [?seven? the name of the Pier or the number of docks?] in San Francisco did, I believe. Probably Pier 23 also. A lot of hides docked at Pier 45, but that was out of the rail cars. [?Coco Cardenalli?] was the foreman there. The hides out of the rail cars were a little harder, because they

might have been in the rail cars for quite some time and the heat would make them stick together, so it would be hard to unload, pull apart sometimes, and they'd be covered with maggots quite often. But Coco would say, "As soon as you get through, you go home." So we used to get through. [laughing] And we'd work hard. So a lot of the hide work we did was at Pier 45 out of rail cars.

[00:28:41] **HARVEY:** You mentioned you worked copra. Was that at the copra dock on the south waterfront?

[00:28:46] **RICH:** No, that was an earlier time when I was a casual in southern California at the foot of Avalon.

[00:28:55] **HARVEY:** What was working copra like that down there?

[00:28:57] **RICH:** Well, the old-timers really had to show me the ropes there. It was hard work for me. The bananas were easier than the copra was for me because you had to do a lot of picking and so forth. So this was for me, so I used a pick down there to get it to an auger, a conveyor-type thing, to take it off the vessel.

[00:29:23] **HARVEY:** Did you use a pick and a shovel?

[00:29:25] **RICH:** On the copra?

[00:29:26] **HARVEY:** Yeah.

[00:29:27] **RICH:** I can only recall using the pick.

[00:29:30] **HARVEY:** Did you guys have a situation where you—

[00:29:32] **RICH:** And I didn't work copra very many times, but I had the opportunity to work it. Just took what you got.

[00:29:40] **HARVEY:** When you worked with a pick, did you have rest time? In contrast to San Francisco, where you'd be 20 minutes on and 20 minutes off—pick, shovel, and then you'd have 20 minutes off.

[00:29:50] **RICH:** I don't know of any place on the waterfront on the West Coast where you didn't have—in San Francisco, there was no necessarily time on or time off, except—

[00:30:03] **HARVEY:** You'd work pick and then you'd work shovel. You'd do different things by 20-minute segments. [Unintelligible] work.

[00:30:13] **RICH:** Yeah, I don't recognize it down in Los Angeles.

[00:30:16] **HARVEY:** What other product was easy, besides bananas?

[00:30:24] **RICH:** Paper cartons. Bananas wasn't necessarily easy. They were 125-pound stalks, but you'd never pick them up above your knees. You'd carry them like that. You'd actually carry them one hand up and one hand down is the way they carried, bouncing them off your knee.

[00:30:43] **HARVEY:** What about the sort of stories about tarantulas and bugs and so forth in banana stalks?

[00:30:49] **RICH:** Yeah, I've seen them there before. I never touched one. But the vessels used to be cooled, so they would be somewhat lethargic. But, yes, there were tarantulas. I've seen them, like I say, but I've never touched them. I never came in contact with them. You used to put your hands through the polyethylene there to

grab hold a stalk, so you didn't know what you were reaching into. But you didn't think about it every time either. It was just, you know, just part of the job.

[00:31:23] **HARVEY:** Yeah.

[00:31:26] **RICH:** I worked a lot of coffee, though.

[00:31:28] **HARVEY:** What was that like?

[00:31:30] **RICH:** If you had a good partner, it was really good. I used to work with Roy [Arreya?] . He and I used to call ourselves the "coffee barons." [laughing] And that's because we knew how to work coffee together. We used to go there and we'd uncover the hatch and there would be coffee bags all the way up to the very top. Then about seven days later, we'd send the last coffee bag out. In the interim would be loading 12 sacks on a board. You'd be working offshore and inshore, offshore and inshore. And the hook never stopped moving, just kept on going. There would always be a load waiting. Then when you went into the wings, there was a special way you built what we called "freeways." We laid rollers down, and if you laid the rollers down, the boards would come out easy right into the middle of the square. If you didn't do it right, the boards would dig into other sacks , screw everything up, you'd have to re-handle the load and all that. We didn't want to do that. Besides that, it makes you look like a rookie [laughing] and we didn't want to look like rookies.

There were also slings. We slung coffee bags out, and there was a special sling called the African sling. So all of this is a running sling, but it's called an African sling by the way you turn it. You turn the [?bite?] , and then you put the [?rutting end? ?running end?] up through a part of the first three sacks, threw a loop around the first three sacks. And when they synched up, the load wouldn't fall down if they had to set it down. They wouldn't fall apart. It was a good way to do it. And so when we slung coffee out, we used the African sling method. We had to teach it to people.

And there was an old-timer by the name of [?Benny Hunter?] that taught me. He was an old foreman from San Francisco Stevedore. No, it wasn't San Francisco Stevedore, it was another stevedoring company.

[00:33:33] **HARVEY:** Anything else you can think about working cargo and working on the waterfront? Any stories?

[00:33:39] **RICH:** I used to go down to Local 10 in the morning. All the talk down there, and we'd be talking about politically relevant stuff and important things, and there would be this boisterous thing down there. Then we'd go up to the window and we'd get dispatched, and we'd go down to the job. Not too many people in the United States can say this, but I loved going to work in the morning.

Studs Terkel wrote a book called Working, and most of the people didn't like going to work because they were dehumanized. Well, we weren't dehumanized. We were brothers down there working together, and nobody could talk down to us. We didn't beg for people to respond to us anyway. We weren't smart-aleks, but we just walked with our shoulders and head erect. And you could do that when you have a strong union like the ILWU advocating for you, because there are a number of people in this country who work hard, like longshoremen work, but they haven't got an outfit like the ILWU advocating for them. I think of farmworkers, the people that are going to pick the radishes that I'm going to eat tonight, all day long in the sun. And they are exploited because they haven't got a strong union like the ILWU advocating for them, because most of the farmworkers in this nation don't belong to a union. So there was dignity on the job, too.

[00:35:27] **HARVEY:** In this period—we’re talking really 1967 to the end of the 1970s—were you, as a youngster—you’d been there relatively three, four, five years, in that range, excepting the 71 strike that comes a bit later in our discussion—were you politically active?

[00:35:47] **RICH:** Yeah. As soon as I was able to become a steward when I was a B man, and our Stewards Council was very active back then. Herb Mills, a guy by the name of [Charlie Tuna, Jerry De Lilio?] was active in it, a guy by the name of [Morrell Marshall?] .

[00:36:09] **HARVEY:** What did you do?

[00:36:10] **RICH:** I was a hold man. I worked in the hold of the ship. So then after the job was over, you went to these Stewards Council meetings, and there’s where you’d learn about the contract, how the contract interacts with other sections of the contract. You’d learn about the history of the ILWU. You’d learn that the contract is a document that was supposed to demand compliance with, but not to gimmick. We didn’t negotiate it to gimmick it, we negotiated it so that both parties would live up to it. So I believe in that; I believed in living up to my end of the contract, and I made the employers live up to those also.

I was known as a bit of a firebrand in San Francisco, and I wouldn’t be afraid to demand compliance with the contract. I’d just demand it. I’d get pushback on that and I’d whip out the contract—because I’d have a contract in my pocket—and I’d say, “Here’s what it says right here.” I knew the contract.

[00:37:15] **HARVEY:** Do you have a specific example of that, a story where you had to enforce the contract?

[00:37:23] **RICH:** Sure. The contract says that a load-out, as an example—that means you’re loading cargo—you’re going to work both sides, it calls for eight men. Only one side will be worked if space or safety dictate that only one side will be worked. Those are the conditions, space and safety. So we were on a vessel one time and we were only told to work one side, but there was plenty of space to work two sides. Then we were going to go work the other side. I said, “No, no, you’re trying to chisel on manning. You want to do with six men what we should have eight men with.” They said, “No, we can do that.” I said, “Here’s what the contract says, space and safety. There’s plenty of work. Call the arbitrator if you want to.” So they say, “Ah, okay, we’ll hire two more men.” So they hired two more men, and so we got it working both sides.

Because they were wrong, and I knew they were wrong, and the reason I knew they were wrong is because Evie Wakefield, who used to be at the International, gave me some great advice. She says, “When in doubt, look in the contract.” And I’ve always carried that with me, because as a young man, I had all these ideas about what things should be like and all that kind of stuff. But when I crack open the contract, they may have already discussed this [laughing] and resolved it. So, when in doubt, look in the contract, so I knew the contract.

[00:38:41] **HARVEY:** Do you remember what year that was approximately?

[00:38:43] **RICH:** Oh, probably 72, 73.

[00:38:51] **HARVEY:** You had mentioned the “Red Mayor,” and you’d already discussed that. I thought we’d go into that list of things, those experiences, and go over those things a little bit.

[00:39:08] **RICH:** Sure.

[00:39:10] **HARVEY:** You wrote down “picket line,” for example. Why did you suggest that as a topic??

[00:39:16] **RICH:** For a couple reasons. First of all, I was in a picket line, of course, in the 71- 72 strike. I was one of the people who voted yes to go on strike. I was against steady men. I think my position has been vindicated. Some people disagree with that, that's their position. My position is mine, and I haven't changed it.

[00:39:36] **HARVEY:** Were you an A man yet at that point?

[00:39:37] **RICH:** Yes. And I was regarded as one of the young Turks. I think the secretary of maritime-something, I don't know who it was—a woman—even talked disparagingly about us in some article someplace. Like I cared, you know? And I don't mean that as a smart-alecky kind of a thing. I have great admiration for people who work. I have great admiration for intellectuals who come to us and say, "How can we help you?" But I don't want intellectuals saying, "Let me draw you a diagram of how to dig a hole." Because you can't do that. Dig me the hole, and that's how I'll learn how to do that. So what I learned on the job wasn't from diagrams, it was from the guy next to me that had more time than me showing me how to do that. And it was the same in union politics also.

I mentioned earlier about Cleophas Williams being a mentor. When I was younger, during the 71 strike period, some people voted for 9.43—that was the steady man issue—at a caucus, and Cleophas was one of them. So I and some other people signed a leaflet saying, "The following people voted for 9.43." We put it out in Local 10 and it cost some people to lose the next election.

Sometime after that, Cleophas got elected to office. I was then the weekend business agent—I had been elected to the weekend business agent—and he even mentioned this while he was doing his acceptance speech. After being sworn in, he mentioned me specifically. The local was going through some financial difficulties and the Board of Trustees suggested perhaps eliminating the weekend position and having the officers come in. And Cleophas said, "No. Richard Austin is doing a fine job as a relief business agent. He's coming down on nighttimes and weekends, and he patrols the dock and so forth." So, here is a person who I helped defeat, who is now defending my position. He was doing it for the good of the union and he didn't take what I said personally.

Only years later did I come to understand that I didn't know the whole story behind why Cleophas voted for that. As a young, exuberant youth who had stars in my eyes, I had also blinders. It was just this way and I couldn't see other alternatives. I later learned that I had made a mistake. I actually had an opportunity to apologize at a caucus for that. I've always regretted putting out that bulletin, and it's because I was operating out of youthful ignorance.

[00:42:34] **HARVEY:** Was Cleophas's name on that leaflet?

[00:42:36] **RICH:** Yes.

[00:42:37] **HARVEY:** How about Mr. Bridges?

[00:42:39] **RICH:** No.

[00:42:39] **HARVEY:** What was your feeling about Harry in terms of the [steady?] man situation?

[00:42:46] **RICH:** Okay, I thought Harry was wrong on that. I thought that Harry was wrong, and I can't say anything more about it. I just think that perhaps—I don't know this—these pieces of equipment were described in manners that maybe would lead one to believe that it took a 747 pilot to operate one; that it was highly sophisticated and this and that and the other thing. So I just think that that may be part of the deal. Having said that, on so many other issues, Harry was right.

[00:43:25] **HARVEY:** Of course.

[00:43:25] **RICH:** Having to do with social and economic justice. That's why my dad truly admired him, for his position on social and economic justice. And peace, by the way. You know, Harry took a hell of a—I'll tell you a story. I went into Louis Goldblatt's office one time—a longshoreman—and he handed me the proceedings, I believe it was, to the 1953 convention. He says, "Here's some interesting reading for you." I believe it was the 53 convention. I've got to go back and research this.

Anyway, Harry took a position—I think it was in that position—to the Korean War, and he was getting vilified by some people, even some people from Local 10. That was the tone of the convention kind of. And then one of the Black brothers from Local 10 got up and he said, "I'm ashamed to be part of my delegation," and talked about all the wonderful things that Harry had done. And there was a shift. You could see it in the dialog of this proceedings. There was a shift in the convention, and it turned, and they understood why Harry opposed the war in Korea; that it was our sons and daughters dying because of a situation that politicians created.

My father was a great admirer of Harry, as was I. You know, in the best of marriages, sometimes we disagree. And that doesn't cause us to run out and get divorces. We work through it, don't we? But on the questions of pensions, and healthcare, and dignity on the job, and nondiscrimination, and jurisdiction, and safety and the dignity that ILWU provided workers, Harry was right there.

He used to come down to Local 10 membership meetings, too, and he'd jaw with the guys. And he had a respect for the hold men. I entered the waterfront as a hold man, and the last day on the job was a hold man. I climbed out of the hold in Local 32, after I had transferred up there, and my last day on the job was out of a hold.

[00:46:04] **HARVEY:** That's nice. On the steady man situation, you'd mentioned that you didn't think it was going to take a jet pilot to run those machines. Were there any other objections or any other difficulties you had with the steady man situation?

[00:46:21] **RICH:** Yes. I thought it was an attack on the hiring hall. I believed in a rotational job opportunities. I believed in the low-man-out system. I believed in the pegboard system. I think we should rotate the jobs through the hall. Now, there always has been certain exceptions to that. There used to be the gear men, coopers and sweepers. They were steady people, right? Well, a lot of times, people didn't want those jobs anyway, but that was longstanding—gear men, coopers and sweepers. Then certain steady clerks' jobs, because the clerks understood the particular paperwork flow of, say, the old Luckenbach docs or [?Williams Diamond?]. These are old companies I'm talking about going way, way back.

[00:47:15] **HARVEY:** Before the 71 strike, as the possibility was looming, did you see—this is a little bit of a leading question, and it's a little bit perhaps questionable to ask a leading questions—but did you see before the fact, before 71, that the steady man could erode the unity of the hiring hall?

[00:47:37] **RICH:** Yeah. We had disagreements in our own Local 10 hall about that. Leading up to the 71 strike, there was a lot of awareness that something is probably going to happen, there's probably going to be a strike. As a matter of fact, like I said, my first day on the job was May 15, 1967. Prior to that we had gone down for the little indoctrination and they said to us, "Save your money, because in 71, it might hit the fan." So there was already an awareness. So in Local 10, there was an attempt to call the steady men back to the hall, and that created some friction within the local.

[00:48:23] **HARVEY:** So I've heard.

[00:48:24] **RICH:** Yes.

[00:48:26] **HARVEY:** What year did you get to be an A?

[00:48:30] **RICH:** 70. My daughter's birthday. So, I've got to mention this, too, about my son and my daughter. I have a daughter, my firstborn, my son, and this union gave me the ability to provide them with the healthcare that they needed when they were being raised; it gave me the income to allow me to raise them with security. You know, it's not anything special that I did. I alluded to this earlier. Sure, I worked hard, but a lot of people work hard, but they haven't got an outfit like the ILWU to advocate for them. So I'm lucky in that respect. Because my mom could have walked one person past my dad and maybe married a sharecropper or somebody. Who knows? Or, maybe a millionaire! [laughing]

So I got lucky, and so part of it—and Jimmy Herman, who I liked—I liked Jimmy Herman—he says, “You know, in some respects, we've got to pass this good luck on. We have to take what we have and help other people.” I learned that at home, but it was reinforced by other people who I admired a lot, like George Kaye, like Frank Stout, like Cleophas Williams, Bill Bailey and others.

[00:50:03] **HARVEY:** You'd mentioned 1948 Labor Day. That had some significance to you?

[00:50:11] **RICH:** I think I mentioned that. That was when I was standing there on the corner of Powell and Market and the ILWU contingent came by.

[00:50:19] **HARVEY:** Okay. There's a question of Anita, and the last name is . . . ?

[00:50:27] **RICH:** That was my two kids I just talked about, Anita and Rich.

[00:50:31] **HARVEY:** Okay. When did you become a single father?

[00:50:34] **RICH:** When I moved to Washington in about 1976.

[00:50:42] **HARVEY:** What about [?Zado?] Products?

[00:50:43] **RICH:** Zado Products was on, I believe, Ninth Street in San Francisco. That was a Local 6 warehouse, and they were trying to run in some scabs. So a bunch of us from Local 10—including Herb Mills, including Whitey Kelm, who is no longer with us, and some others went down there, and we were going to join the Local 6 people on their picket line. And all of a sudden, through the picketers came this guy, and he's strutting like this, and he's supposed to be the scab shepherd; he's going to shepherd the scabs through. I heard the rumor that he's a martial art expert and this and that.

Well, an old Black man from Local 6 took off his shoe and hit the guy over the head with it. And then the shit hit the fan. I remember there was this guy laying across the hood of a cop car—the cops have arrived by now—one of the scabs, this martial arts guy—he's leaning over the cop car, he's got a bloody nose and a bloody lip, and he says, “I want to make a citizen's arrest!” And I swear, at that very moment, I says, “It certainly is a scab! He's even trying to take the cop's job away from him!” [laughing] As it turned out, Whitey Kelm got arrested, and I went down to the “Seventh Heaven,” as we called it, Seventh and Bryant, and got him out of jail and took him back to the hall.

There was another time, Lyons Magnus. That was when Curtis McClain was president of Local 6, and they were going to move out of town and they weren't going to provide for the workers, any severance or anything of note. And Curtis McClain was not going to let that happen. So he stood on the railroad tracks and he refused to let the railroads enter that was going to take the cargo from Lyons Magnus down to someplace in the valley to a non-union house.

A couple days before that, we had heard about it. This guy from Local 10 and I heard they were going to bring up some scab trucks to do it instead. The scab trucks were parked in these big, open fields a few blocks away. Without going into detail, we just did a job on them [laughing] so that they weren't operable.

[00:53:26] **HARVEY:** Can you go into a little detail?

[00:53:27] **RICH:** Well, yeah. We crashed in some windshields and popped some tires. That's because we were protecting our brothers in Local 6. And I have no use for scabs, and so that was all fair.

Another time, another guy now deceased—we used to call him the “Gorilla”—he was my partner, [?Manuel Dominguez?]. During a Bottlers strike here in San Francisco, they had scabs delivering Coke and beer and stuff. We were going down Montgomery Street one day and we saw a Coke truck parked there. He just stopped, we got out, we took out our knives, we shoved them through the tires and drove on. [laughing] We carried knives in those days because longshoremen did carry knives; they had to cut line and so on and so forth.

[00:54:21] **HARVEY:** What kind of knives?

[00:54:22] **RICH:** Just pocket knives. You'd cut lines. It was one of the tools. We had a hook—Manuel Dominguez, the “Gorilla” and I, he wouldn't work with anybody that didn't carry a hook. Well, I always carried a hook because that was part of our tools. And he wouldn't work with a guy that wore gloves. Well, I didn't wear gloves because they sometimes because hindrances because they could jam up your fingers and so one, you could get them caught in the bridles and so on.

Another time Manuel Dominguez and I went down to—Manuel is gone now, God love him, so I can say these things. I think the statute of limitations has run out for me—I hope. [laughing] So we're down on Market Street. So Jimmy Herman—no, Jimmy Herman isn't president yet. He's president of Local 34, and he and Johnson—what's his name, from the Retail Clerks—Walter Johnson. So they started United Labor of San Francisco, and they went and they sat down inside the Emporium—it was on strike—and a whole bunch of people went and sat down with them. And the cops came in and said, “You know, if you don't move, you'll be arrested.” They looked up and they says, “Figured that might happen, and when we leave, there will be another thousand come in, and when you arrest them, there will be another thousand come in.” They saw the futility of it, so they got out for that day.

The next day, Manuel and I go down to the picket line, and they're running the scabs through the alley in the back, and we popped a couple of them. And then we got the hell out of there, because we figured [laughing] we were going to get arrested for something.

So, I used to protect other workers. I was young and exuberant then, and I believed that the hard-fought gains that organized labor made on behalf of workers should not be minimized by people who are just for hire by a boss who wants to take away those hard-fought gains. I have no use for a scab.

[00:56:39] **HARVEY:** That seems fairly evident. Let's go back the 71- 72 strike. What did you do during the strike, besides certain activities on behalf of the union? How did you survive? How did you buy food at the grocery store?

[00:56:59] **RICH:** So they had military cargo, so they rotated those jobs through the hall. I didn't do that. I went out and drove a cab. I did my picket duty in the daytime, I served on committees during the daytime—the strike committee and so on—and then in the nighttime, I'd drive cab. So I didn't take any of the work out of the hall because I didn't need to, and I survived just fine. As a matter of fact, I made more money driving cab—I mean, on the legit driving cab—all you did was drive cab—this was back then, 71- 72, but I did work at night as a

longshoreman. That is all shifted now. We used to make \$46.92 a night, I think, back then, and I used to make \$80 a night driving cab.

[00:57:54] **HARVEY:** Do you remember any picket stories during the 71 strike?

[00:58:03] **RICH:** We had a picket clearance committee, and the picket clearance committee used to ascertain whether or not somebody who said, “Can we get a particular cargo freed so it could be moved off the dock?” Exceptions like one of the cancer hospitals in San Francisco. Of course it was released. So those kinds of emergency things, the clearance committee released the cargo, so the longshoremen went down and assisted.

Another time we had this flying squad, and that’s if people tried to bypass us. One time, I think it was down near Pier 32, there was a boat in the water, maybe 26-foot open boat, and they were loading [?stories?] in it. And we didn’t have any desire to make the crew starve, but these were not crewmembers. They belonged to a ship chandler at that station in San Francisco. Those things never made it out to the vessel.

[00:59:22] **HARVEY:** How was that expedited? [laughing]

[00:59:25] **RICH:** How did that happen?

[00:59:26] **HARVEY:** Yeah.

[00:59:27] **RICH:** We climbed down to the goddamn boat [laughing] and threw some stuff over the side, and those other guys went running.

[00:59:35] **HARVEY:** How could they go running if they were on the boat?

[00:59:36] **RICH:** They got off. They went up the ladder. We didn’t rough them up or anything. We could have, but we didn’t. But they should have known better because they were walking through our picket lines. So, you know, there’s a crew out there and the crew, they’re not our villains. They’re our fellow workers. I want you to know that Local 10—and locals up and down the coast—have done a lot of volunteer work to make sure that people don’t go hungry. If they said, “We need the food for the people out there,” this is a great big, giant steamship company. They could afford to hire us to do that. So, we advocate for foreign workers, we advocate for domestic workers, and we assisted whenever they needed our assistance. But we wouldn’t let people come in and do the job of longshore.

This is another story. This was back in 48, I think, there was a strike. My dad took me down to the dock, and the warehouse was open. A passenger ship was coming in, and so they used to load passengers, perishables and mail. We worked that even during the strike. But somehow, they were going to bring on some scabs to work the cargo. I’m a little kid. I’m seven years old, I don’t know all this, right? But I know that I’ve seen these guys coming down the dock and they’re in brand-new Frisco [transcriber capitalized Frisco here because I think it’s a brand name] jeans, brand-new hickory shirts, brand-new boots. And all of a sudden, my dad takes me and he throws me in the warehouse. “Stay there,” he says. And I heard some stuff outside—yells and this and that—and pretty soon, they come back in, and I went back outside and all those guys had run down back off the dock, and there was some boots floating in the water. [laughing] They had taken off their boots and thrown them in the water there. I think this was at Pier 35, I’m not certain. I think it was a passenger vessel at Pier 35, but I’m not certain it was at Pier 35. They did what they needed to do.

[01:01:44] **HARVEY:** Yeah. I had one more question on 71- 72. You remember Taft-Hartley was invoked by President Nixon?

[01:01:51] **RICH:** Yes.

[01:01:52] **HARVEY:** Do you remember going back to work, and how that unfolded?

[01:02:01] **RICH:** We went back to work under the provisions of the Taft-Hartley. The whole port had been jammed up, and so they needed all the people they needed. Right? So the contract was put back in place, basically, and the contract has a provision in it that you don't work shorthanded, and if one or more gangs show up shorthanded, you amalgamate the gangs in order to make it a full gang.

In the process of doing that, you may have a couple extra people that aren't called for in the manning. Well, what are they going to do for that day? So, on a couple of occasions, they tried to amalgamate the guys but send the guys who are extra people, who went beyond the manning, back to the hall. And I wouldn't put up with that. I was saying, "We're still on strike. We're just injuncted back to work. You can't treat our workers like that. They came down here willing to go to work, and now you want to send them back to the hall because you say we're over-manned. Live with it." We walked off a couple ships because of that. I don't know if the International particularly liked us doing that, we were just supporting one another. So we were going to demand compliance of the contract when we went back to work.

[01:03:22] **HARVEY:** There are some people who think that sometimes we would slow down during Taft-Hartley. Is there any comment on that or any story that you might like to tell about that?

[01:03:33] **RICH:** I don't recall that, as a matter of fact. Honestly. I don't recall a slowdown. I remember this: there was some B members who hadn't had a lot of experience working in the hold. On this one ship at Pier 50 again, as happenstance would happen, wound up all in the hold together. So there were all inexperienced people down there, and the foreman wanted to fire them because they were of slow productivity. Well, they just didn't know what the hell they were doing.

Rather than saying—and we would have done this—"Would a couple of you A men go down and show those guys how to do it?" We would have sent a couple of those guys to our gang, we would have gone down [in the hold], even if it was doing a favor for the employer by making sure—those are still our brothers down there. We were going to give them the opportunity to teach them. So we said, "If they are gone, the whole ship's walking." "You can't do that" because of the Taft-Hartley injunction against us. [shrugs] "We're not. It's up to you. If you fire them, you've created the work stoppage." [laughing] So they didn't fire them, and as it turned out, a couple of us voluntarily went down there and switched places with them and showed them how to—actually, they were drums in the hold of a vessel. So if you knew how to work a drum, it wasn't hard work. But if you didn't know how to work a drum, it was very hard work. So, we had an opportunity to teach them how to work the drum.

[01:04:58] **HARVEY:** How do you work a drum?

[01:04:59] **RICH:** Well, you don't lay it down. You roll it on its edge. So you break it down and you just roll it. You have to keep balance. And then when you kick it into place, [when] you're kind of going to kick it into place, you make sure your hands are back here, because the rim of this drum is going to hit the rim of the drums that are already there, and if your fingers are in between, bad things are going to happen. So, if you didn't let the drum get the best of you, it wasn't hard. Neither was coffee. Coffee was good work.

[01:05:31] **HARVEY:** When you worked drums, did you use a longshore hook?

[01:05:38] **RICH:** No. Never did. Never used metal on metal. I never did. I understand some people might have. Not me. [Used] my hand.

[01:05:47] **HARVEY:** Did you ever see a drumhook that had one little tooth that came backwards?

[01:05:55] **RICH:** Maybe, but I don't recognize seeing them.

[01:06:02] **HARVEY:** You had a question here, something door—N-O-R-D door?

[01:06:08] **RICH:** That's sometime later up in Washington after I transferred up to Washington.

[01:06:12] **HARVEY:** That's later, okay. What did that refer to?

[01:06:13] **RICH:** Nord Door.

[01:06:13] **HARVEY:** Oh, it's a company?

[01:06:14] **RICH:** Yes.

[01:06:14] **HARVEY:** Okay. Maybe we should get to some of the PCPA, FUJ, Farm Workers and so forth later on. It sounds like that comes later?

[01:06:36] **RICH:** Yeah.

[01:06:38] **HARVEY:** You had over here constitution, the Ten Guiding Principles and issues relative to the contract. Are you referring to the 2014 contract negotiations?

[01:06:50] **RICH:** No, just the contract in general.

[01:06:52] **HARVEY:** Should we save that for a little later?

[01:06:56] **RICH:** I think the first two parts are integral, however, is that our International constitution has four guiding principles, or four objectives, and we have Ten Guiding Principles. And if you read those, that's a bible for working-class solidarity. It doesn't say just to fellow unionists, it doesn't say just to ILWU members, it says "workers are workers the world around." And it means that we should have solidarity amongst workers. It says in there that every picket line must be treated as if it were our own. Unfortunately, in my estimation, too many unions have negotiated the right to observe their picket lines away, and they come up with all these phony reasons for working behind somebody else's picket line. Well, I just think that the ILWU's position was correct, not going behind picket lines.

So you have to learn that stuff, and you learn it by the old-timers in the union, because they didn't do it. And what they passed on to me was a gift. They did the hard work. They're the ones that put it on the line. When they passed it on to us, it was a gift, and it is our gift to keep and improve if we could.

[01:08:21] **HARVEY:** How does that relate to the contract, to the coastwide longshore contract?

[01:08:24] **RICH:** The contract also was a product of strife, of struggle. They didn't just one day say, "Hey, why don't you guys have a safety code?" We had to demand that safety code, and we demanded the safety code because we wanted our workers to go home at the end of the day. We didn't think anybody should have to work unsafely, and so I take the safety code very seriously. It says in the safety code words to the effect of convenience versus safety, safety first; tonnage versus safety, safety first. Three different things, I just can't recall right now. But safety first is it. That was our demand. We were the people who demanded the safety code. That's part of the contract. And then when the contract calls for you to do this job, you have to make sure that nobody else is going to do that job. That's your contract, that's your jurisdiction. You have to make sure that

you protect that jurisdiction and that you don't, say, let somebody else do it because it's more convenient for you. You don't do that.

[01:09:34] **HARVEY:** In this particular period, after the 71 strike, are you politically active at all in any outside political entity at all?

[01:09:44] **RICH:** Sure. Shortly after the 71 [strike] , I was active. I was in the US-China Peoples Friendship Association. Some people said that was part of the Revolutionary Union, which it wasn't. I knew people in the Revolutionary Union, although I was never a member of the Revolutionary Union.

[01:10:15] **HARVEY:** What was the Revolutionary Union [RU] ?

[01:10:16] **RICH:** The Revolutionary Union was a Maoist Communist Party.

[01:10:21] **HARVEY:** Was [that] the RC, the Revolutionary Communist?

[01:10:23] **RICH:** They changed it to that, the Revolutionary Communist Party, but it used to be called the Revolutionary Union.

[01:10:28] **HARVEY:** This is before that even.

[01:10:30] **RICH:** Right.

[01:10:34] **HARVEY:** During our strike at one point, they went out and they gathered 10,000 signatures for us in three days. Ten thousand signatures in Local 10, this area, in three days. And they didn't take any credit for it. They didn't have their banner up. All they were saying was, "We're here supporting the longshore." That's the way the old RU used to be, helping other workers in distress. I wasn't a member of that, but I used to help in the Chinese community in various places they had problems. And then, in 1972, I was picked to be a delegate—one of 18 delegates from the U.S.—that went to the People's Republic of China, when it was called Peking and Canton and so on. We were the guest of the Peking and Shanghai workers. They paid our airfare, they paid our lodging, they provided for everything. In fact, they even gave us some yuan when we got there. That's when Zhou Enlai and Mao Zedong were still alive.

You say you were picked to be a delegate. Who picked you?

[01:11:50] **RICH:** I believe it was the Revolutionary Union.

[01:11:54] **HARVEY:** So this is not one of the ILWU overseas?

[01:11:57] **RICH:** No, no.

[01:11:59] **HARVEY:** But you were not a member, and they picked you as delegate?

[01:12:01] **RICH:** Right. That's because I was active in labor [and] I was active in the Chinese community. I believed in internationalism, I believed in the furtherance of U.S. peoples friendship, I believed that workers are workers the world around. If we get the capitalists out of the way, we can make a lot of headway.

[01:12:22] **HARVEY:** You say you were active in the Chinese community. In what sense were you active?

[01:12:28] **RICH:** As an example, if at a sweatshop someplace they needed some support, we'd go down there and we'd picket with them and so on. It was just like when we were active in support of the United Farm

Workers. Local 10 had a proud history, as did Local 34, of supporting the United Farm Workers. Jimmy Herman was a great supporter of Cesar Chavez.

One time at Pier 41, the Farm Workers were going to come down there and picket scab grapes. We were working an APL ship at Pier 41. I had gone up and down the ship and I said, “The moment the first load of scab grapes comes, hoist it on the deck, leave it there, shut off the gear and let’s leave the vessel.” We don’t know what’s going to happen. The first load of scab grapes came on the vessel, I hung it on the hook, shut off the gear. And you hear that [makes a whining noise] a little bit when the gear shuts down. Then you hear the next one [more whining noises] . And pretty soon the entire ship is silent. Five or six gangs—this is Pier 41—we all walked off the vessel in solidarity, and walked across the street to the Eagle Cafe and saluted ourselves [laughing] for our solidarity. But that’s the kinds of things we did back then.

I think I just deviated from the question you asked me about—what was the question?

[01:13:59] **HARVEY:** The question was the question about politics. What were your political involvements?

[01:14:06] **RICH:** Oh, yeah. And so we used to help other workers in distress—that was the point I was making—so the US-China Peoples Association. When a group of people in the Chinese community were experiencing difficult times, I used to go down there and lend them a hand. But we did that with all workers.

[01:14:29] **HARVEY:** Maybe at this point we can go into some of the offices that you’ve held and things you did. Because around this time, in 73 to 76, you became a BA [business agent] for Local 10.

[01:14:40] **RICH:** Yes.

[01:14:40] **HARVEY:** In 1973, you become a BA. What moved you to run for office?

[01:15:04] **RICH:** Well, I had been active on committees. I was on the publicity committee, I was on the Board of Trustees, I was on the executive board. It was a progression, I think, that I had done my homework, I had learned about the union, I had great teachers in the union. Another one that I failed to mention earlier was Odell Franklin, who was a great mentor also. So I just thought that I had something to offer. I didn’t want to beat anybody. It wasn’t a contest against anything, I was just offering up my services, and if I got elected, I got elected.

[01:15:43] **HARVEY:** You say you were on the executive board already by that time?

[01:15:45] **RICH:** Yes.

[01:15:47] **HARVEY:** When did you first run for executive board?

[01:15:49] **RICH:** The first year I was eligible to run, 1970.

[01:15:55] **HARVEY:** Were you a bit of a hot dog perhaps?

[01:15:58] **RICH:** Yeah, I was.

[01:16:00] **HARVEY:** Okay. So what’s it like starting out as a BA? All of a sudden, you’re elected to be a BA. Now what? Now what do you do?

[01:16:09] **RICH:** My training on the Stewards Council gave me a good foundation for becoming a business agent, because I knew the contract. I was confident that I could interpret the contract correctly, that I could have

on-the-job arbitrations. That's what we had back then. On a safety beef, you had an on-the-job arbitration—you'd call right there—or otherwise represent the rank and file. So, when I got elected, I used to get a big kick out of going out and patrolling the ships. I'd climb down in the hold with people. I'd throw a few sacks with them, just because I was still young and I know the guys that I'm working with, and I'd go and—so I was a weekend business agent to begin with, so the weekend business agent was on 48 straight hours. They weren't sitting in the office all that time, they just got called when they were needed. Well, I'd still go out and patrol. So I'd patrol the day side, I'd patrol the night side, I'd climb down in the hold of the ship, this and that and the other thing. And I did a good job. I made sure the contract was observed.

I think the waterfront was a little bit different back then. I can recall one time I was also on the executive board and there was an executive board meeting while I was on duty as a business agent, and it was an important vote that was going to take place on the executive board. And I got a call and it was from the Oakland Army Base, and the winch driver is saying he's having to climb over cargo on the deck in order to make the signals. Okay? And they don't want to hire another guy. "So put the superintendent on the phone, will you?"

He wasn't around, so a little while later we went and got the superintendent. I got a call from the superintendent. I said, "Do me a favor." "Yeah?" "I'm in the middle of an executive board meeting right now. Hire a man." He says, "Okay." So there was an understanding that I didn't owe him anything. Because I wasn't going to say, "I'm going to repay you down the line." That's not the way I worked. Saved me a trip over there. I probably would have got the guy hired anyway, but it just saved me a trip over there.

The PMA [Pacific Maritime Association] was a little bit different then. The job situation was a little bit different. In my estimation, sometime in the 2000s, the PMA took a turn that I regret to this day. They hired too many pencil-pushers and not enough people that know the blunt end from the front end, as we said on the waterfront.

I enjoyed myself as a business agent. I had a very important arbitration that gained national significance. I was sitting in the business agent's office on a Saturday or Sunday, and I got a call from Pier 50 again. [chuckles] I think it was Pier 50. They were discharging coffee from a vessel that they suspected had asbestos residue in there. So I called up CHEMTREC in Washington, D.C. and said, "Lookit, we expect asbestos is in the hold of the ship, and what do we do?" They said, "Full body suits with self-contained breathing apparatuses."

Armed with that information, I went out to the dock and I engaged the superintendent. The superintendent got snotty with me, so I called up both of the gangs. And I was going to call both of the gangs anyway because there was no full-body suits, there was no breathing apparatuses or nothing else. So, we had an arbitration, which I thought was unnecessary. I mean, this is asbestos. So the arbitrator [Urhan?] came out, and I told him what I had talked about with CHEMTREC, and he immediately said, "Everybody has to come out, and it has to be done according to what CHEMTREC did." Then I looked out on the dock and I saw all these bags out there, and I said to the superintendent, "See those bags out there?" "Yeah." "I'm going to get them quarantined now."

I called up and I arranged the FDA to have all those bags covered with polyethylene and weights put around all the bottom. They were on pallet [ports?]. Then I had a Local 75 guard who was ILWU, because this is what FDA wanted to have happen. They wanted those to be watched all the time, so there was a guard on duty 24 hours a day until they somehow disposed of them. Shortly after there, just very shortly after that, within a couple three days, I moved up to Everett. So that was my last thing.

About a month later, southern California used that arbitration as a template, and then after that, we made sure we didn't handle anything that had asbestos on it. Of course, the maddening thing about all this is that people who should have known should have provided a safe workplace, because we were working cargo that was a

carcinogen and not that much was thought of us as a working-class people to protect us against those kinds of deadly, deadly cargos.

[01:21:59] **HARVEY:** Was this around the same time that Herb Mills was involved in asbestos?

[01:22:10] **RICH:** Yeah.

[01:22:11] **HARVEY:** Is this part of the Herb Mills effort?

[01:22:12] **RICH:** As a matter of fact, that's in your book. He referred to me as "Dick."

[01:22:17] **HARVEY:** That's right. So that's part of that situation?

[01:22:21] **RICH:** Yeah.

[01:22:23] **HARVEY:** How come you take off for Everett, Washington?

[01:22:28] **RICH:** In all honesty, I was going through a change of marital status. And so the mother of my children—wonderful person—and I agreed that it would be easier for me to take the kids up to the north than it would be for her to raise them in the city and me in absentia. And so I took the two kids up north, moved to Whidbey Island, went into Everett, Washington. The Everett local was very gracious. I worked off the floor up there for a while and then got transferred in.

My kids did well. They went to school up there. Both graduated from South Whidbey High School. Both of them married wonderful people. I have wonderful grandkids. Knock on wood. My son went to Washington State. I had a vision of him being a teacher; he had a vision of him being a longshoreman. [laughter] And so ultimately, his vision prevailed. He worked as a casual, and I can remember one day—I was an officer in San Francisco but I was a vice president now—I came back from a meeting of some kind and the Coast Labor Relations Committee told me, "We just registered X number of people in Seattle." I said, "Oh, great." He says, "Your kid was one of them." [looks shocked] So I knew he was in line, but I didn't know he was going to make it. That was a very proud day for me.

I have a son-in-law who's a longshoreman in Anacortes, so for me, the circle has kind of closed, you know, because my son-in-law is a great worker, a good working-class ethic. My son is a great worker, good working-class ethic. They both love the unions. They both participate in supporting the ILWU and other unions.

[01:24:28] **HARVEY:** Your son is an officer, too.

[01:24:29] **RICH:** Yeah, he's an officer now. He's the president of ILWU Local 19. I've got to tell you a story about him. He was on the labor relations committee, and this PMA representative—nice person—was looking through the contract for something and couldn't find it right away, and Rich says, "Oh, that's 17.28," whatever it was. She said, "Well, how do you know that?" He said, "Well, some people had Little Red Riding Hood read to them when they was a kid. My dad read the contract to me." [laughter] That wasn't true, but it cracked everybody up. And he's smart like that, he comes up with those kinds of deals.

But it goes back to the lesson I learned from Evie Wakefield. "When in doubt, look in the contract." That's what I passed on to him also, so he knows the contract inside-out, backwards, forwards and so on. He knows what the contract says, and that's worth a lot. And he's an advocate for the working class.

[01:25:33] **HARVEY:** You say you were vice president of Local 32?

[01:25:36] **RICH:** President.

[01:25:37] **HARVEY:** You were not vice president before that?

[01:25:40] **RICH:** No.

[01:25:40] **HARVEY:** You've only been there for three or four years—I guess that's a while—and you became the president already? You'd never been there before?

[01:25:50] **RICH:** No. As a matter of fact, before I even transferred in, they asked me to help them write arbitrations, because they identified me as a person that knew the contract. And so I did, and we won some important arbitrations up there. They treated me very well. And the president of Local 32—just so everybody knows—it's a working president. I got paid zero money [laughing] and I made my living out on the ship; I chaired the meetings; I was a member of the labor relations committee, and so on. And I presented the arbitrations as well, but I was a working longshoreman.

[01:26:35] **HARVEY:** Anything unique or special about that experience or being in that local?

[01:26:41] **RICH:** Well, there's so many wonderful recollections of that. I've got to tell you about one time when we were opposing the building of the Everett homeport. We were opposing it becoming a Navy base because we thought that that land should be used for commercial cargos rather than a military installation. At that time, Ron Dellums was slated to become the chair of the House Subcommittee on Defense Appropriations or some darn thing like that. He was a supporter of ours. So a group of us went from Everett—a woman who later became a state legislator—and I went down and met with Ron Dellums in Oakland. It was at the 1984 Democratic convention. I was a delegate to the Democratic convention.

Ron Dellums had his fundraiser, and, man, it was going, it was cooking. [snapping his fingers] It was really cool. He made some speeches—he was a great speaker, Ron Dellums was. Came down and met with us. And he believed in our mission. The Republicans took control of the House so he didn't get that position. But I had asked my local to send some money down to the International with the hopes that they would give it to Ron Dellums. And I'm dancing on the head of a pin here, okay?

So while I'm making this speech, this guy by the name of Jamie Boland, who was a dear, dear ILWU member—he's now deceased, but he would do anything the ILWU asked. He stood up and he said, "Point of order." "Yes." "If Austin shuts up now, I move we send the \$5,000 unanimously." [laughter] Everybody started laughing, and that was the end of it. Jamie was just assisting me along, but that was the kind of ...

I used to bring things to the local, and there was another guy up there, his name was Ron Thornberry. I don't know if you've ever heard of him or not, but he was on the International executive board for a while. He was a member up there, and he and I used to argue. [makes a growling noise] And out of those arguments came ideas, and so we had a good relationship. Ron was a person who also loved the ILWU and was grateful and so on and so forth. But he's one of the people who nominated me for International vice president when I finally ran for vice president a few years later.

The local treated me very well. When I brought them some issues, they trusted me. I didn't bring them bogus, phony self-aggrandizing issues. I brought them real important issues that followed the historical outlet of the ILWU about social and economic justice and peace.

[01:30:14] **HARVEY:** Between 82 and 86, you became president of the Pacific [unintelligible] District Council.

[01:30:19] **RICH:** Yes.

[01:30:20] **HARVEY:** Any high point of that that you remember, that experience?

[01:30:22] **RICH:** Yeah, I think what we did is at some point, the IBU [Inland Boatmen's Union] wasn't members, or wasn't full-fledged members, and we brought them in and made them full-fledged members. I don't think the Pensioners or the Auxiliaries were necessarily either at that time. That's my recollection. I could be wrong, but it seems to me that we wanted to open it up so that we would have the full ILWU family in there.

We also set up some voter registration drives, and Danny Beagle was then the editor of The Dispatcher, and he got us a voting registration list and so on and so forth. What we did [was] we volunteered to answer phones on PBS on Channel 9 during the fundraising, so the ILWU was on television answering phones and all that. Just getting the word of the ILWU out there. We met with politicians and gave our position on various issues. I think we were very helpful to the IBU at that time when they tried to do some things to the IBU that would have been detrimental to them.

[01:31:37] **HARVEY:** Exactly. In 1988, you ran for Coast Labor Relations Committee.

[01:31:46] **RICH:** Actually, I was appointed.

[01:31:49] **HARVEY:** How did that come about?

[01:31:51] **RICH:** [?Randy Veckage?] was going to go for vice president, and so that was going to leave an opening. I believe the International officers' terms were three years and the Coast Committee was for two years, and so that was going to leave the Coast Committee vacant for a year. They've since made them the same. There were some folks—I wrote and said I was interested in it. Publicly, I made this so; people knew that I was interested in it. Phil Lelli, right here in Tacoma, was one of my supporters.

[01:32:39] **HARVEY:** Who appointed you? The president?

[01:32:40] **RICH:** The International president, Jimmy Herman. So then I became Bobby Olvera, Sr.'s counterpart until Bobby got sick. Then Bill Ward came in for Bobby to fill in for a while.

[01:33:00] **HARVEY:** Coast Labor Relations Committee 88 to 93. Any high point from that that you can recall from that five-year period?

[01:33:07] **RICH:** 88 to 93?

[01:33:11] **HARVEY:** Yeah, when you were first on the Coast Labor Relations Committee.

[01:33:15] **RICH:** I think I was on it about six years. We went through some contract negotiations. Had some important arbitrations. A few of them involved people who had lost their registration due to problems connect with drug and alcohol. So I advocated for them. They had to jump through some hoops and show a clean slate for several months, some period of time, before they sought re-registration.

Then-arbitrator [?Sam Cagle?] , who was a person I admired, had a real sympathy, a real compassion for people like that. So there was a program put in place where if they kept their nose clean, they could be re-registered. I think that it's an addiction, it's a disease, the entire family suffers when somebody loses their job. The entire family likewise benefits when somebody gets their job back. So I arbitrated and we won several people getting their jobs back. Jurisdictional arbitrations, I won some of those. Lost one that devastated me.

[01:34:50] **HARVEY:** Which one was that?

[01:34:51] **RICH:** It was the one having to do with Seattle, and the merger between Korean Shipping and Hanjin. And to this day, I think Sam made a mistake. You know how we say, when we win an arbitration, it's because we were smart. When we lose an arbitration it's because the arbitrator didn't understand the issue. [laughing]

[01:35:11] **HARVEY:** What was the issue?

[01:35:11] **RICH:** Hanjin was buying Korean Shipping or vice-versa, whatever happened back then, and they wanted to inherit the subcontracting relationships. I said, "No, that subcontracting relationship was granted to first shipper and not the second shipper, the person that bought it." Anyway, I lost that one basically. I lost it, but it later provided the basis for a demand to go into negotiations if it was one of the negotiations.

[01:35:52] **HARVEY:** You decided to run for vice president—and this is a big deal to make this decision—in 1993. How did you come to that?

RICH: I quit the Coast Labor Relations Committee. I'll tell you why I quit. I missed my kids and grandkids. I just missed them. I was a single parent, mind you, so I have a very good relationship with my kids. I just missed them. I was kind of pining away a little bit, because they were in Washington and I was in San Francisco and I didn't see them often enough. And I wanted to be a grandpa, but not in absentia. I wanted to be a grandpa. So I decided to leave. That was a hard decision, but I did. A year later, I ran for office. Well, wait a minute. That's because I was asked to run for office by Brian McWilliams. He asked me to be the vice president.

But you'd still be in San Francisco.

[01:37:01] **RICH:** Yep. I only did one term. Because what stopped me before—being an absentee grandpa—hit me again. So I was the vice president, and it was a very tumultuous time. That administration was a very tumultuous time, and I didn't enjoy myself at all. I think there were a lot of attacks. I think some of the attacks were unwarranted. But I don't take any shit, so if somebody accused me of something, I would come up—I can remember one time at a caucus I said, "I'm going to hand you out some crap that the PMA is putting out, just to put you on notice." Twenty minutes later, somebody comes up and says, "Why in the hell is Austin passing out this goddamn PMA crap?" I walked up to the microphone and I had the piece of paper, I ripped it in two and I threw it out in the crowd. I says, "That's what I think of it. I already announced that once. Don't ever accuse me of being" blah blah blah.

So, I didn't take any crap. But it was a tumultuous time. I'm glad to see that today the officers are working together, because when the officers work together, it seems to me that the union works better. We can keep our eye on who the real enemy is, and the real enemy is the capitalists and not our fellow brothers and sisters.

You know, which reminds me. My dad was an old Wobbly. Working in the woods, he was an old Wobbly. He says, "You know, the unions in the United States are the best ones we have. So if you're going to criticize the unions, don't do it anyplace else but in a membership meeting, not out in the public forum." I took that to heart, so I never did do that. I'd never criticize or find fault with a union—with a program or policy—publicly. I did it within the correct forums—the membership meetings, caucuses and conventions—and I'm telling you, that holds true today. If you've something worthwhile to say, say it in a membership meeting, not on the goddamn social media.

[01:39:38] **HARVEY:** It does make it difficult, but I thought I'd ask anyway—and you can take it as you will, in whatever way, as far as you care to go—you say it's tumultuous. Do you care to get into that in any more detail?

[01:39:55] **RICH:** I just think that Brian's presidency wasn't received very well by some people in the union, so I don't think there was any, you might say, honeymoon. I think that people were throwing darts at him the day he took office, and by extension, the rest of the officers, I think, to a certain degree. The Coast Committee—the Coast Committee now—was somewhat dysfunctional. They had fallen behind in the arbitrations, they had fallen behind in what we call referrals being handled. Till one day he said, "Will you take over the Coast Committee again and see what you can do about that?"

In a caucus subsequent to that, he was criticized for that, and I was criticized for that, till we pulled out the number and we said, "The number of pending referrals are at an all-time low, and we've handled more arbitrations—that we've won, by the way—more than any time in the last five years. So there was a reason why I was put in charge, and that was to clean up the backlog of ILWU referrals and arbitrations that had not been addressed."

Later, after that, I taught labor relations. One of the things that I teach is don't let the employers hold these things over and over and over, because you'll have a backlog. You'll also have disgruntled members saying, "Why can't we get some action?" So, move it to arbitration if you think it's a good arbitration. If it's not, let it go.

[01:41:43] **HARVEY:** But if the arbitrations were expedited, how come you were getting heat?

[01:41:49] **RICH:** They didn't know. No, they got heat that I was put back in charge of the labor relations committee. So the people who were making these complaints didn't have the knowledge that the referrals were at an all-time low, and that our pending arbitrations were way down now. When they got up at the microphone at the caucus, they didn't have that knowledge.

[01:42:19] **HARVEY:** How did they react after you told them?

[01:42:22] **RICH:** It went away. Took the wind out of the sails, for that particular time. I was a person who would fight back, and so I wasn't necessarily personally attacked. I'd fight back. I wouldn't put up with crap.

[01:42:46] **HARVEY:** But then you go on the executive board from 96 to 99.

[01:42:49] **RICH:** Yeah. That's the International executive board, so I no longer run. Now I'm on the International executive board.

[01:42:59] **HARVEY:** You were there from about 96 to 99. When did retire off the waterfront?

[01:43:11] **RICH:** 2003 at age 62.

[01:43:13] **HARVEY:** What's going on between 99 and when you leave the executive board in 2003?

[01:43:21] **RICH:** Just working in the area. As an example, I had mentioned earlier the United Labor of San Francisco and Jimmy Herman and Walter Johnson. We had a situation up in Everett that I helped—I was one of the people that formed United Labor of Everett. What we did was we helped other workers in distress. So there was some LPIW, Lumber Production International Workers—good, progressive union—who were up against at

Nord Door. The son had taken over and he'd screwed everything up, and so they put him out. So we had a huge labor rally in Everett, about 5,000 people showed up at this.

One of the things that we were talking about is we shut down. We walked off the ship and we went up to participate in this. Marv Williams, the head of the Washington State Labor Council, was up there as a speaker. I was a speaker, several other people were speakers.

[01:44:26] **HARVEY:** What year is this, Rich?

[01:44:30] **RICH:** Probably 83. This is before 83, excuse me. I'm jumping back now.

[01:44:43] **HARVEY:** It's all right.

[01:44:43] **RICH:** We had an agreement that the Boeing workers were going to do it and so on and so forth. At the last minute, they can't stop work because of the sanctity of the contract. So I just want to say to everybody who might be listening to this, the sanctity of the contract must go two ways. Yes, we must observe the contract, provided that the employers observe the contract. But when they take our goddamn jobs and move them offshore to some nation that exploits the workers, where's the sanctity of the contract there? It's a two-way street. So that's how I felt about it.

In the aftermath, I think it's kind of turned out, because Boeing has not been very loyal to those workers up there. And Boeing is owned by international investors. We don't have any U.S. companies anymore. They're all owned by international investors. It's one of the things that pissed me off during negotiations. We're sitting across the table from people who are trying to pull on us what they can't get away with in their own countries, and they're using U.S. laws to do it. So it's skewed, it's really skewed. The laws in the United States are skewed against the American working class.

And the Democratic Party and the Republican Party are both responsible for that. The Glass-Steagall, NAFTA, CAFTA, the Iraq war—that was all bipartisan efforts. That phony welfare reform—personal responsibility—that devastated single mothers. That was a bipartisan deal. The cuts to the SNAP program. That was bipartisan. SNAP, that's the food program for hungry people. That was a bipartisan cut. So we can give billions of dollars of tax breaks and tax deferrals and so on to the war profiteers, but we can't take care of—today, in this country right now in 2016, according to UNICEF, one-third of our children live in poverty. Eight years ago, only a quarter did—not “only” a quarter, that's a really high number—but it's increased.

So I want to know, where the hell is this recovery going? Who's benefiting from this recovery? Stock market's up. I went to my banker and I said, “Hey, how much is my mortgage now?” And he looked at me like I was stupid. “Doesn't it help me?” And he looked at me like I was stupid again. So I went to my doctor. “How much is my doctor bill been reduced because of this great stock market?” My doctor looked at me like I was nuts. I'm being facetious. “Tell me where this recovery is helping.” There's a greater economic disparity today than at any time since the Great Depression. And our one-party system with its two wings, each with several caucuses, are responsible for it.

[01:48:07] **HARVEY:** Yeah, all to the good. You're no longer on the executive board as of 1999 or 2000, in that range.

[01:48:21] **RICH:** Right, I didn't run again.

[01:48:23] **HARVEY:** How come you didn't run again?

[01:48:25] **RICH:** I was gearing up for retirement kind of. So there was kind of a transition there where there was nobody really available who wanted to fill that position. I don't think you should just thrust a neophyte into the International executive board, so in that three-year period, people were kind of groomed who came along and had some understanding of the International, its functions and so on and so forth.

[01:48:55] **HARVEY:** You retired in 03. When and why did you get involved in the Pacific Coast Pensioners Association?

[01:49:04] **RICH:** To carry on. Retired from the job, not from the struggle. I'm not kidding you about that. We got so much from this union, my kids got so much, I've got so many great memories. It's a very difficult thing to describe to non-longshore workers that there's this thing. And I don't know if other workers have it or not, but I know that in longshore, there's this thing. There was a writer—his name was [Jim Hamilton?]—from Local 10 who wrote a short story about it, and it captured it. It captured it. And it captured it by saying to my loved one, my wife, "I can't describe it to you. I just can't describe it. It's a feeling. It's not words."

So that's how these people at the Pacific Coast Pensioners Association are. They just feel this love and gratitude. By the way, we are a very grateful bunch. I've got to say this about our ILWU. I don't know of another union in the United States, truly, that treats its pensioners the way the ILWU does. We get to voice our opinions at caucuses and at conventions; we're asked to sit on the Negotiating Committee; we're asked to participate in legislative conferences, going back to Washington, D.C.

I am currently a delegate to the Labor Campaign for Single Payer. Our travel expenses and per diem are paid for by the Longshore Division and the International union. In 2014, I was the pensioner designee on the Negotiating Committee. That means I was in San Francisco for 10 months. The Longshore Division paid for an apartment for me down there and per diem, and my travel down and back. It probably cost them \$50,000 because of all the rent—the high cost of rent in San Francisco—for all of that.

That's what they think of us. So we give back to the rank and file, too. We participate. You've heard some of the stories about the workers being involved in educational projects and so on. I taught at a couple of the educational things that we've had at the union as a pensioner. It's all a labor of love. We don't get paid for anything—well, I should say, we get paid every day. It's called pension. [chuckles] But what we do on behalf of the union is a labor of love. We wouldn't accept a dollar for any of that. All we get is our transportation and food expenses. We wouldn't accept a dollar for it. So we give back. That is why I'm one of many people in the PCPA who gives back to the union.

[01:52:07] **HARVEY:** Exactly. What were the negotiations like? What was that experience like? What were the big problems, big issues, difficulties at that time?

[01:52:15] **RICH:** It was a very sour experience to me.

[01:52:18] **HARVEY:** How do?

[01:52:19] **RICH:** When we go into negotiations, the Negotiating Committee is schooled. We do all the research that we need to do. So when we sit across the table and we hear employers say things that we know aren't true, when they put on these PowerPoint presentations identifying issues that have been disproven three years ago, we know that this is not good faith negotiations in my estimation. So I don't know if they were trying to make an impression on the committee representing shipping companies. I don't know what it was, but it was disingenuous. When you call them on it—"Christ no, three years ago we disproved that"—"Oh, well, you got us." That's basically their attitude. And it became frustrating. I'm not kidding you, I felt like going across the table a couple of times. And I'd be the person to do it because they can't de-register me! [laughing] No, that

would break up the decorum of the negotiations, but I just felt that way sometimes. You have to sit there with a poker face. “Nothing you say bothers me.”

[01:53:31] **HARVEY:** What would they say if you called them on a situation in which they were not telling the truth?

[01:53:35] **RICH:** The International president did. [shrugs] That was just “Well, you got us.” They didn’t say that. “We hear you.” That’s the end of it.

[01:53:50] **HARVEY:** Can you tell us a little bit about how Bob handles those negotiations, including how he handled a situation where the employer was not telling the truth.

[01:54:00] **RICH:** What we’d do is we would make sure that we were right. Bob is very mindful of that. You don’t want to throw crap across the table that you can’t prove. Right? So we would re-research and we’d find out [?what the truth was?] and we’d throw papers back at them—Bob would. Bob was the spokesperson. One spokesperson, not everybody chipping away. And that’s as it should be. Bob would throw back the facts across the table and point them out one, two, three, four, five, six, seven. “Where the hell are you guys going with this?” So they would say, “Yeah, well, we hear you.” That’s what the employers would say basically.

So it was, I’m sure, frustrating for Bob, too. He did a good job. He was up against some difficult times. They were trying to stall us. One of the things they did during the negotiations is they locked us out. But before they locked us out, what they would do is they wanted to create a scenario that we would get the blame for slowdowns. So what they would do was they would hire two gangs—two ship gangs, two crane gangs—on a vessel when normally they would have four. Then they would complain to the press that productivity was down 50 percent. Well, yeah. You’ve got half the people you normally hire. But the press doesn’t know to ask, “Were you hiring the same amount of people?” So they would get away with that, and then they would fire a gang for low productivity, fire the ship for low productivity. So they created this thing to get the farmers and so on against the union. They lied about it. There was no slowdown going on. People can say what they want to say, but they created it to put us in a bad light.

I believe somewhere along the line that some of that was found out by whoever, a higher authority in some governmental body. But the Secretary of Labor came out and said Obama wanted a settlement. Bob made it very clear “We want a settlement, too, but we’re not going to sell our soul in order to get a settlement. If you call us all back to Washington, D.C., that’s the way it’s going to be, but we’re not going to give up on this.” So it turned out okay.

[01:56:42] **HARVEY:** If the employer would tell something that you guys knew was untrue, would Bob still say, “We have to go and check that out in our records”? How would he confront the employer?

[01:57:01] **RICH:** I can’t recall. Bob understands the pension and healthcare plan, those thing, so most of the time he would just be able to respond. But sometimes what you wanted to do is throw a piece of paper across the table and say, “Look at the date on that. It’s three years old. We’ve already taken care of it. It was bogus three years ago.”

But they have done it at the local level, too, as of late. There was a time up in Seattle where they presented an old arbitration as a document in a new arbitration. The old arbitration had been vacated, but they didn’t tell anybody that. But my son remembered that that had been vacated, so he called them on it. Well, that didn’t use to happen in the ILWU-PMA relationships. I think they resort to subterfuge and dishonesty and stalling and so

on and so forth. I think it's not just us. I think that there's an attack on progressive unionism the world around, in other Longshore Division unions, too.

[01:58:23] **HARVEY:** Absolutely. Just a little more on Bob. Bob has a charismatic style. That's obvious.

[01:58:30] **RICH:** Yes.

[01:58:32] **HARVEY:** It would be obvious to somebody listening to this in 40 years, but it's the case. Can you describe how he would address the other side? And if you remember any particular story, that would be helpful.

[01:58:52] **RICH:** First of all, Bob is the spokesperson for the Negotiating Committee. The Negotiating Committee comes together and makes its decisions based upon what the caucus approves. So it doesn't make its decisions, what it does is it hones the demands down. So, Bob is mindful of that. This is what the caucus pushes for. You can't get everything. There was an old-timer—he's now gone—Del Edgbert said that he served on a Negotiating Committee and he says, "You know, I know why they call it negotiations. We go in with demands and we have to negotiate them. If we got everything we wanted, it wouldn't be called negotiations, it would be called takings." [chuckles] That's true. So you have to go in and negotiate. Well, you have to negotiate the important stuff. Some stuff, in my estimation—this is my humble estimation—is not as important. I think jurisdiction, safety, healthcare are the most important.

So Bob has a good understanding of the pension plan, the medical plan, so he's able to present those. And he kind of does it in a way that overwhelms them. So they have to be on the other side of the table. If they're unwilling to engage in the bantering that goes back and forth, there's only so much you can do. "Well, you heard us." That's it. That's the end of it, you know? I mean, we could only say to them the same thing so many times, because we know they heard it, so it was frustrating.

One of the things about Bob is that he gets the committee all amongst ourselves, and we get to blow off steam. It's very important because everybody on the— [unintelligible] how many times if the employer said, "Okay, we're ready now." "Hold on. We're not ready yet." Everybody is representing their constituency, and they're representing the whole Coast, and they have to feel like they got to say what they needed to say and were listened to, and that what they had to say had some discussion. That happened with Bob. It's very important—very important—that that happens.

[02:01:12] **HARVEY:** So you're saying he was sure that everybody had their say.

[02:01:17] **RICH:** He encouraged it. Encouraged it.

[02:01:25] **HARVEY:** A couple of other little points that you'd written down. The FUJ farm workers issue. You mentioned a little bit about that before. Did you have an additional take on that?

[02:01:40] **RICH:** So, the FUJ—Familias Unidas [por la Justicia] —they're a group of farm workers who work at Sakuma Farms up in Skagit County. Several years ago, they began an organizing drive, and they've been repelled by Sakuma, and ultimately Driscoll had something to do with that, I believe—I can't prove it, but Driscoll buys a lot of the berries from Sakuma and distributes them. And so the farm workers have been at it, have been at it. They walk out of the fields sometimes. They stop the company from hiring guest workers when there was no need to hire guest workers. Guest workers mean that there's a shortage of labor available. Well, there wasn't a shortage of labor available. There was a shortage of labor available that would work for cheap. [chuckles]

And so they got the community support, they got the support of the Washington State Labor Council, the International union gave them money. We kept at it and at it, we assisted in a boycott. Last year in San

Francisco the PCPA marched up to Whole Foods and raised hell up there. I met with the manager of the store. I said, “We’ve got a bunch of longshoremen. We’d be happy to put all these Driscoll berries on a pallet and wheel them back into your chill facility.” They said we can’t do that. “Well, pass this on to your manager.”

So that was one of the straws. There were many straws, a lot of different people, a lot of different organizations, like the old grape boycott days. You know? And so we got word that Sakuma had agreed for a union vote with the FUJ. So you have to have an Excelsior list—an Excelsior list is a list that’s supposed to identify the employees, and it’s possible to gimmick those and put people on there who don’t exist, or put people on there who never worked there but you know will vote no against the union. So you go over the Excelsior list. If it’s clean, then you go ahead with the vote.

Our International sent up and International organizer, Jon Brier, to assist in that effort. That was part of the result of a resolution that ILWU Local 25 introduced at the 2015 convention in Hawaii, calling for support of FUJ. So, rather than just passing resolutions, we put our money where our mouth is, we put our action where our mouth is. We supplied bodies to help with the effort up there. We marched. I spoke at a rally and announced the fact that Local 19 refused to handle the boycotted berries and got a big cheer from that. As we’re speaking here—this date, 9/12/16—they’re counting the votes tonight. And I hope that tomorrow morning, I’ll be able to make an announcement at the convention that they won the vote, which we think they will. The next step then is negotiating the contract.

[02:05:06] **HARVEY:** Can you give their name in Spanish?

[02:05:08] **RICH:** Familias Unidas por la Justicia. That’s screwed up. I just screwed it up. It’s Families United for Justice.

[02:05:25] **HARVEY:** Speaking along those lines, you’ve had a radio show over these years.

[02:05:29] **RICH:** It did.

[02:05:29] **HARVEY:** For a long time, I mean. How did you get into that? Why did you get into that?

[02:05:35] **RICH:** So I’m retired now, so we formed up this group [up there] called the Labor-Democrat Work Group. They’re labor first, who happen to be Democrats. Labor first. Labor first. At the International level, sometimes our unions have arguments, but on the local level, our workers need some assistance—the teachers, the nurses, the teamsters, the farm workers. This group helped organize the maintenance workers into the ILWU in Local 25. We assist one another in times of struggle. Going back to your question?

[02:06:32] **HARVEY:** The radio program.

[02:06:33] **RICH:** Oh, yes. So Rick Robbins, the head of station KSVR up there, the station manager at the Skagit Valley College approached us to form a radio show. So we did. I became the host, and later on there was a co-host. I had a lot of contacts. If you live as long as me, you’re going to have a lot of contacts. That’s all there is to it. [laughing] I had people back in Washington, D.C. I know, politicians here, people there, people in Australia. I had a lot of contacts. I had local people also, so I had a lot of good, poignant interviews.

Earlier this year, the station came to us and said, “Can the show raise some money, because we’ve lost a lot of our grants.” So, for money, you get PSAs [public service announcements] . So I went to the ILWU District Council and I said, “There’s two ways you can have a PSA. You can have a PSA at any time throughout the day or night sporadically, or you could have a PSA embedded in the program.”

The name of the program was “We Do the Work,” and I would say something like, ““We Do the Work,” underwritten by the International Longshore and Warehouse Union Puget Sound District Council.”

“Our program was being picked up all over the country in a lot of other places, so it would be heard all over. That would be good. We want the ILWU’s name to get out there.” So, ILWU sent the check.

The people I was working with on the program says, “That’s favoritism to the ILWU, because no other union will be mentioned the show.” I said, “Well, yeah, every union that kicks in some money will be mentioned. All they have to do is kick in the money.”

Two of the people don’t belong to a union. They voted against me and this other person, I think. I think the vote went against me because there was a misunderstanding, and then hardheadedness came in. But I just say, “Screw it.” I wasn’t going to let them piss on the ILWU, so I walked away from the program.

Now the station manager wants me to start my own program. That’s because I’m not anything special, but I have a style that people like the way I do the interviews. I do research so that when I go into the interviews it’s relevant. I’ve interviewed Lori Wallach from Global Trade Watch. I know what questions—I ask relevant questions. I introduce the program, and I make my case while I’m introducing the program, and the questions that I ask support that. But that’s because I already know that that’s what that person wants.

The other thing was that we were only going to interview our friends. Enemies of labor have all the press they need. We were only going to interview our friends. Well, a couple people on the program thought that they were smart enough to interview ALEC politicians to pull the covers. Well, it was ALEC politicians that let the covers get pulled, so they got some airtime that they didn’t need. You know?

That was after I left the show. I’m gearing up to start another show. It’s going to be called “Workers’ Radio.” Anne Feeney, the wonderful labor troubadour, has already given permission for me to use her song, “[Dump] the Bosses Off Your Back.” That’s coming in the next few months.

[02:10:33] **HARVEY:** That’s good. You had a section here: “Any worker in distress, an injury to one is an injury to all.” You may have covered this already, but do you have an additional take on that?

[02:10:47] **RICH:** It’s the underlying foundation of the ILWU. If you look at the Ten Guiding Principles: Help any worker in distress. An injury to one is an injury to call. That’s the old Wobbly saying: An injury to one is an injury to all.

Harry came out of the Wobblies, was greatly influenced by the Wobblies. Like I said, my dad did, too. A lot of the old-timers did. The Ten Guiding Principles, I think, are kind of a product of that kind of thinking also. If you look at the Ten Guiding Principles, there’s some wonderful things in there. Given the facts, 99 times out of 100 will make the right decision. The key phrase is “given the facts.” So like at caucuses and conventions, sometimes the officers are up there and they’re giving bad news, and people get pissed off because they’re given bad news. But my dues buys that bad news. I also want the good news that the officers share, but the officers do their job when they give you the news. The facts. Ninety-nine times out of 100, we’ll make the right decision if we’re given the facts. ILWU does that, and I think that that’s part of our heritage of helping every worker in distress, because you know we do.

[02:12:09] **HARVEY:** Yeah. There’s one thing that we somehow didn’t hit, and that’s the 2002 lockout. That’s a year before you retired. Did you have much involvement in that, and what did you do yourself during that 2002 [lockout] ?

[02:12:26] **RICH:** I was on the Negotiating Committee, 2002 also. I was on six different Negotiating Committees.

[02:12:28] **HARVEY:** So you were on that Negotiating Committee?

[02:12:34] **RICH:** Yeah.

[02:12:35] **HARVEY:** What was that experience like? Because that was a big deal with that big lockout.

[02:12:38] **RICH:** Yeah. Same thing. I think a video talked about this, “Eye of the Storm,” or whatever the name of it was. So I think, once again, this was pre-arranged by PMA’s new chaos- creating, chaos way of doing things, hoping that they were going to get relief from Washington, D.C. It’s a very trying time, really, because you’re negotiating the contract on behalf of the union. You have the rank and file and the pensioners and all the dependents and so on, their well-being at stake. So it’s hard to stand up to the pressure that you receive, but you know you have to so that we can carry on this great tradition that we call the ILWU.

They would like us to buckle, and there’s a lot of pressure to buckle, a lot of pressure to give back some of the things. Like there’s a big attack on our healthcare. We have a solution for them. Join us in advocating for single payer. Your healthcare problems would go away. We don’t have to negotiate them anymore, Mr. Employer. So, there are solutions to these.

[02:14:11] **HARVEY:** You remember [Joe] Miniaci, who was PMA chief at that time?

[02:14:13] **RICH:** Yep.

[02:14:14] **HARVEY:** What was he like?

[02:14:15] **RICH:** I didn’t have any use for him. No, I mean he lied to me and Glen Ramiskey in front of all his people on an issue that had come out in some labor relations minutes, and he admitted he made a mistake and would withdraw them. And a week later, I says, “Where is the withdrawal?” And Terry Lane, the vice president of the International, said, “He changed his mind.” No, you don’t change your mind. He was wrong to put them in in the first place. It was part of the creating chaos.

He went up and down the coast meeting with some officers. Well, I come from the school that if the president of the PMA walks into my local, the president of the ILWU better be with him. Because I don’t talk to the president of the PMA without my president being there. Okay? Those guys talk to each other up there. He’s not going to come down and try to sway me, you know? Mr. Austin, you’re so important, you get to call the president of the PMA. I don’t want that. He tried to go up and down the coast to undermine International officers. My position is that presidents meet with presidents, vice presidents meet with vice presidents and so on.

[02:15:34] **HARVEY:** Do you remember what he said to try to undermine the officers? Miniaci’s got quite the reputation.

[02:15:40] **R:** Yeah. Well, I just think that one of the things he showed up there is one of the deals, you know. At one point, he presented something during negotiations that was clearly B.S.

[02:16:01] **HARVEY:** What was that?

[02:16:02] **RICH:** I don’t know what the issue was, but I remember he said—so here are three arbitrators. There was a chief arbitrator and the two others. And he says, “No, we didn’t say that.” And the arbitrator says,

“Excuse me. Let me read you what I’ve got in my notes. What did you have?” he said to the other arbitrator. “What do you have?” So they all had that he had said it. So then they had a break. They had a break and came back, and I guess Miniaci’s memory was restored, because he admitted saying it. Well, that’s really bad faith negotiations.

[02:16:41] **HARVEY:** Was this at a meeting?

[02:16:42] **RICH:** Yeah, the a negotiating session. And he didn’t know the contract, so he was there just trying to create chaos. What he said is, “You know what we need? We need a letter out of you saying that there will be good faith and that there won’t be any illegal work stoppages.” All right, well, we thought about it. So I went back to the apartment that night and I’m thinking about it. Okay, it wouldn’t be any harm to give them a letter. So I wrote down what Section 18 says, right out of the current contract that’s been there forever. And I wrote down what they said in the section about work stoppages, and I read it out of the contract. We’d put them in different places and then didn’t attach any contractual number to them. How does this sound? [he pretends to read] That’s what we need. I looked across the table at some of the PMA people who knew it and they [looks askance] . You know? They knew what happened to them.

What was he trying to do? We’re supposed to solve problems, not prolong them or create new ones. We’re supposed to solve problems.

[02:18:01] **HARVEY:** Not to be editorial, but my impression was that he was hired as a union buster.

[02:18:07] **RICH:** He was, in my estimation. I don’t think that PMA has gone too far away from that. I think that the way that they’re doing business now doesn’t resemble the way they used to do business. They farmed out a lot of their stuff. They’ve got people who I think are afraid of their jobs at the local level and so on, and get canned today. I don’t think there’s any loyalty amongst the PMA people for their own people anymore. I think it’s been demonstrated. So it’s a sad state of affairs that that’s the level of labor relations that the PMA has sunken to.

[02:18:42] **HARVEY:** Can you pinpoint why they changed and when?

[02:18:46] **RICH:** Why they did? Well, they did it, I think, just at the end of the Clinton administration and the beginning of the Bush administration, and I think that they thought they probably found a friend in the White House. The anti-union Republicans had already captured the House, and Newt Gingrich’s Contract with America and all this other stuff. And Bill Clinton perpetuated some of that stuff by putting some of the Newt Gingrich’s programs forward. “Oh, Bill Clinton did a great job.” In my estimation, he’s going to go down as one of the lousiest presidents of the United States in terms of what the working-class of the United States needed in representation. I don’t think he was good for the working class. These are my unbiased opinions, of course. [chuckles]

[02:19:47] **HARVEY:** That’s okay. I didn’t mean to lead you into Bush, but I thought that might have something to do with it. It seemed like it at the time anyway. Do you have any questions, Conor? What do you think we’ve missed?

[02:20:06] **RICH:** I don’t know. You’ve been pretty thorough. I’m just very grateful to the ILWU [unintelligible] .

[02:20:15] **HARVEY:** Sometimes we ask a question at the end, wrapping up, looking back, what it all meant. You’ve laid that out to a great degree, but any last wrap up looking back statement that you’d care to make?

[02:20:30] **RICH:** Yeah. If I had to do a few things over again—which we can’t do, but I’ll pass this on to the next person—is that we have a lot of passion when we love the union and we think that we’re right, that our way is the correct way, and there’s sometimes old-timers who will mentor us if we allow them to do it. Seek out the information of people who have been there for a while, and then make your decisions.

One time I was asked to speak at a high school on Careers Day. Reagan was the president at the time, and I said, “How many people believe that the Sandinistas are trucking arms across the border into El Salvador?” Because that’s what the president said. All these hands went up; 85 percent of the people thought the president was telling the truth. So I gave my little pitch about unionization and I said, “Please don’t just take what I said as the truth. Do some counter research. Do you have a map here? I want to show you something. Between the country and El Salvador and Nicaragua is this place called Honduras. How do you truck arms across the border?” [chuckles]

Not even newscasters called them on it. They’re monitor readers. There’s no newscasters. Edward R. Murrow is long gone. There’s no newscasters anymore. Maybe some of the people on public radio, but the modern newscasters now are monitor readers. They don’t tell the truth. Like this crap that’s going on back in Flint, Michigan. Two years—two years—those people have been suffering back there. You know how long it took to pass the TARP? Two weeks. Two weeks! So Wall Street gets bailed out in two weeks and poor Black people in Flint, Michigan are still suffering the effects of poisoned water. What the hell is wrong with our country?

So, looking back, I just think that I’m glad I became a longshoreman. And I can’t think of anything else I’d want to do. I loved going down to the hall, I loved my brothers and sisters, I loved the banter, I loved the arguments, I loved the forum that it provides us to talk about social and economic justice and peace. That’s what my union stands for.

[02:23:12] **HARVEY:** That’s great. Thank you very much. Much appreciated.

[02:23:16] **RICH:** Thank you.